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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000054

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DEPARTMENT FOR PRM AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2017

TAGS: PREF PM

SUBJECT: PANAMA UNLIKELY TO ACCEPT MIGRANTS

REF: STATE 3439

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM EATON FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

11. (C) Panama is highly unlikely to accept Caribbean migrants in the event of a mass migration, due to historical sensitivities to U.S. military presence as well as a general reluctance to accept displaced persons. In addition, Panama lacks the institutional capacity to run a migrant camp. Per reftel instructions, below is post's assessment of Panama's ability and willingness to house migrants in a mass migration contingency.

a. Panama would not be willing to establish a camp to house 1,000 or more migrants. Panama is extremely unlikely to host a U.S.-funded, built, or run camp. Given the legacy of U.S. military presence in Panama, it would be too politically sensitive for the GOP to even consider such a measure.

b. Panama would not be willing to establish such a camp, whether or not the United States took on migrants at GTMO. Panama will expect the United States to bear the brunt of any outflow.

c. Panama is unlikely to take migrants from any countries. As far back as post can recall, Panama has turned down all USG requests to house migrants from any country. Furthermore, Panama already has issues dealing with the displaced persons from the Colombian conflict and would not be capable of dealing with additional migrants.

d. Willingness to accept Cuban migrants would not be greater in a post-Fidel environment. Rather, Panama would likely see a less compelling case to take on migrants from a post-Fidel Cuba.

e. Post does not anticipate any negative impact on political or bilateral issues if we approached Panama.

f. Panama would be unwilling to establish any camp, regardless of size and which government paid for the camp.

g. Panama would not want any camp, not self run and certainly not U.S. run, with the sensitivities to U.S. military presence in Panama. Given Panama's problems with prison overcrowding and harsh prison conditions, we cannot be confident that Panama can run additional facilities.

h. Panama would object to a U.S. built or run camp and would expect the United States to take any migrants.

Eaton